

the drive belt and motor spindle, the latter sticking out of a massive free-standing casing that is located, with another rubber belt, on the side of the 'spider' base, a tri-star element that connects the three support pillars.

The platter's top surface features a hard polymer layer that is designed to transmit energy more efficiently in the vertical plane than in the lateral, the idea being that vinyl resonance is channelled away from the disc into the platter and thence through the bearing to the subchassis.

This all adds up to a very substantial record player, most notably in terms of height – some 18cm (more than seven inches). Width and depth figures aren't particularly unusual (41x39.5cm) and will be easily accommodated on the average equipment support.

The purpose of this heavy, all-aluminium engineering is to isolate the sensitive parts of the system from the outside world, and to maintain constant (angular) velocity at the stylus/vinyl interface. The latter is achieved by a very high torque Crouzet motor, which 'pulls' 140mN and is hand-rebuilt by Avid. The electronic motor supply was designed by Guy Adams of Voyd turntables fame, and takes cues like split phase and crystal locking from that classic deck.

The suspension system is adjustable from below each column – you need to put the deck on a speaker stand or similar to achieve this – but it only needs to be done if the arm is changed. The suspension itself feels and looks very impressive – tap the platter and there's none of the yawing or pitching that you'll find with most sprung decks. Instead, the energy is absorbed in a vertical bounce that tails off very smoothly. In all functional respects this appears to be an extremely

**T**urntable design has traditionally fallen into one of two schools of thought. On the one hand there is the lightweight, spring-suspended approach embodied by designs from Linn, Pink Triangle, Wilson benesch et al. On the other, you find high-mass platters supported by meaty plinths in models from Nottingham Analogue, Verdier and any number of small Japanese brands. There are, of course, exceptions, such as Rega's lightweight-no-suspension designs, and high-mass designs with suspensions such as those from Michell and SME. And it's to the latter group that this turntable belongs, albeit taking the approach to extremes by using a 10kg platter and very meaty suspension to match.

Priced from £4,000 depending on finish, the Acutus is a new name on the scene, and when I first saw it, and found out it was made by

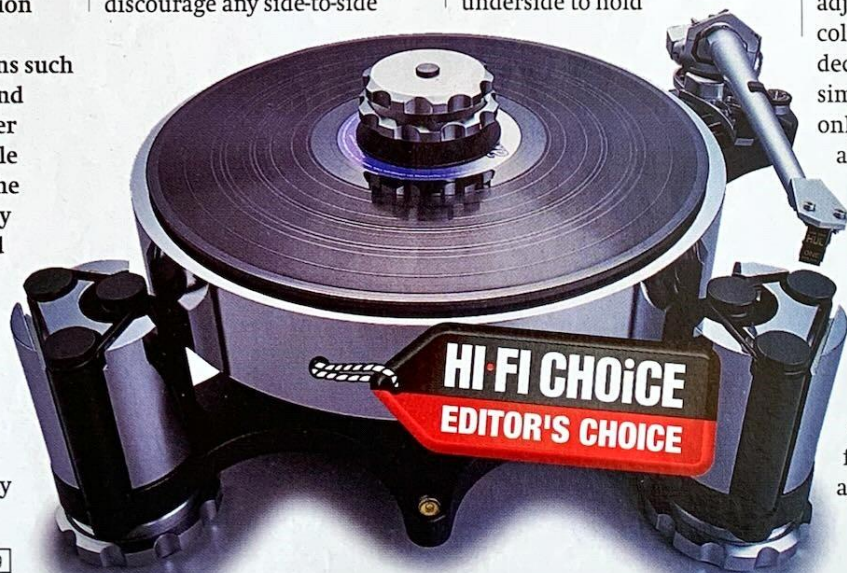
one Conrad Mas, I assumed it was of German origin – the taste for big, chrome hi-fi is a lot stronger there than it is here. But Conrad is as English as the next turntable enthusiast, it would seem, and the reasons for the Acutus' size and weight are pure physics.

There are some quite unusual elements in this turntable, the suspension being the most obvious. This combines very strong vertical springs with nitrile 'O' rings acting as lateral retainers to discourage any side-to-side

movement. These rings are held by the three caps you see at the top of each supporting pillar.

The subchassis is a large casting, with an unusual V section in each supporting arm, the shape being designed to dissipate vibration and give huge rigidity. This subchassis supports the large tapered bearing housing that, in turn, supports the platter. The bearing itself is an inverted affair with a ruby thrust ball.

The aluminium platter has a wide slot cut out of its underside to hold



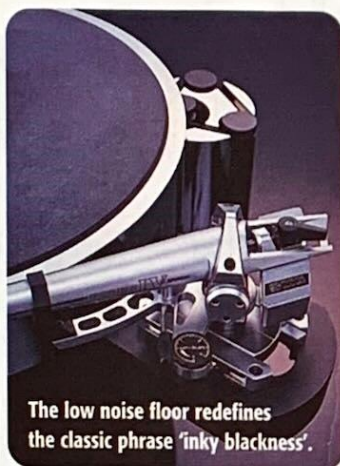
well thought-out turntable. Fit and finish quality is also high, if not quite approaching my SME Model 20A reference.

The Acutus has one element that appears to have been inspired by SME: its record clamp. But, being Avid, it couldn't just be a regular clamp – nothing short of a veritable monster would do. The clamp is pretty big and made up of a central face which holds the record centre against the bearing housing, plus an outer clamp which presses the record down onto the platter, helping flatten out warps as well. Avid recommends that the clamp be screwed down extremely tight for best results. This makes changing records a relatively slow process, but the sonic improvements wrought by tightening the clamp an extra turn are not subtle, so it's worth the effort.

#### SOUND

For the purpose of this review I used a variety of ancillaries, including: SME Model IV arm, van den Hul MC One Special and Wilson benesch Carbon cartridges, Michell Iso/Lithos phono stage, DNM 3C Twin/PA3, Krell KAV-500i, Roksan ROK-S1 and Lundahl Mag amps with B&W N802 and Living Voice Avatar speakers.

As the deck turned up with the vdH cartridge fitted, that's where I started, and while the results were pretty stunning it



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soon became clear that this cartridge was overdriving the 'highly sensitised' phono stage. Switching to the Wb Carbon sorted that out and the deck really started to motor.

First impressions are of considerable presence and precision, a good LP taking you right to the musical event, such is the degree of ambient resolution. After a while it becomes clear that this is largely due to the turntable's extraordinarily low noise floor. It redefines the classic phrase 'inky blackness', and does so in such unobtrusive fashion that you often wonder, when you've just let go of the arm lift, if the needle is on the record at all. Suddenly there's sound; it makes you jump – it also makes you wonder how much rumble there is on other turntables.

With a high-mass platter and high-torque motor there's an expectation that the bass performance will be special, an expectation that is fully rewarded by the Acutus – but not in an overpowering sense.

You're not distracted by the lower registers – rather, they act to underpin the music and reinforce its power. I've not heard Massive Attack's bass-heavy *Mezzanine* sound as alive and powerful as it did here – there's a lot more going on down there than you'd think.

The Acutus isn't heavy sounding either, which can be a problem with mass. In fact, its inertia seems to supply tremendous agility and speed, and dynamics leap out of the speakers. On the other hand, compressed records sound compressed – the Acutus revels in what it finds in the groove, good or bad.

And while this doesn't extend to making worn records unplayable, it can't cover up the distortion such wear produces. The prices charged for 180g pressings suddenly seem very reasonable when you hear the results. *Sketches of Spain* (Miles Davis) has a presence that is tangible – the horn is there in the room.

Only after writing most of the sound section of this review did I realise that I hadn't made it clear how much information this turntable is capable of extracting from a record.

It is simply phenomenal – every familiar record I put on offered up new layers of sound, more nuance and fine detail. And the more complex the material, the more rewarding the experience.

It's important to emphasise that this deck does not have the characteristics that turntable enthusiasts associate with typical high mass or suspended designs. It seems to have combined the strengths of both, while avoiding the weaknesses. And while fans from both camps might feel that it is weak in one respect or another, they'll be hard pressed to find an alternative at or near the price that is so competent across the board.

#### CONCLUSION

The Avid Acutus is one of those hi-fi components that you quickly get used to. Because it doesn't seem to introduce any colour of its own, there's really very little that you can say about it – apart from what your records sound like, because that's what you get to a greater extent than with any other turntable I've tried.

Some rivals have enhanced timing, bass extension or dynamics to give them an edge in those departments, but none have the range and neutrality of the Acutus.

And while the deck is perhaps not quite as beautifully finished as some, its beauty shines through the records you play on it. Don't underestimate the power of vinyl.

#### VERDICT

**SOUND** ★★★★★

**BUILD** ★★★★★

**VALUE** ★★★★★

**PRICE** £4,995.00

**£3,995.00 MATT CHROME**

Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings; don't even think about selling your vinyl till you've heard it on this!

■ ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

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The Acutus' suspension system is adjustable from below each column.